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DEPARTMENT FOR P STAFF AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/20/2016

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SUBJECT: ARAB MAGHREB UNION - POSSIBLE UNGA MEETING

REF: STATE 148914

Classified by Political Counselor Craig Karp for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Political Director of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) confirmed to polcouns in a September 20 meeting that the AMU fully endorses the proposed AMU Ministerial on the margins of UNGA (reftel), but noted that AMU SYG Ben Yahia's physical absence from N.Y. (he has not been invited to UNGA), prevented him from convening it. The Director stressed that the AMU Secretariat was prepared to support the meeting (e.g. by sending diplomatic notes to member states), but opined that Libyan Foreign Minister Shalgem was best positioned to host/convene it. End summary.

¶2. (C) In an introductory visit to the Secretariat of the Arab Maghreb Union September 20, the Political Director of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Zoheir Merchaoui underlined to Polcouns that AMU SYG Ben Yahia is fully supportive of a ministerial meeting of AMU states on the margins of UNGA (reftel). A career Tunisian diplomat and longtime aide to Ben Yahia, Merchaoui clarified that the AMU is in fact registered with the UN and recognized as a regional organization. However, Merchaoui observed, the AMU has no physical presence in New York and Ben Yahia has not been invited to UNGA, precluding his ability to organize the meeting himself. Ben Yahia is currently travelling in Europe.

¶3. (C) Merchaoui nonetheless underlined that the AMU would be willing to facilitate such a meeting by sending diplomatic notes to the concerned states endorsing the idea. Noting that Libya currently holds the AMU's rotating presidency, Merchaoui encouraged the USG to reach out to Foreign Minister Shalgem who could convene his AMU counterparts in New York. He characterized Shalgem as a "pro-American," who frequently defends the position of the U.S. in Arab fora.

¶4. (SBU) The rotating AMU presidency is supposed to change hands on the occasion of AMU summits. However, Merchaoui noted, the AMU has not had a summit since 1994. Algeria held the presidency for nine years but, according to Merchaoui, finally decided "enough was enough" and relinquished the title to Libya several years ago. Following Libya, Morocco is next in line to hold the AMU presidency, he observed.

¶5. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

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